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The Hunt Begins

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Deadly hunters stalk the Cularin system. Dispatched by an unseen power for a single purpose, they stalk, slay, and disappear without a trace. They live only to kill, following the command of their shadow master: Kill the Jedi. Kill them all. The hunt begins in our latest supplement to the Living Force campaign!

Aggressors stalk the worlds of the Cularin system. These hunters are silent, deadly, and completely without mercy. They are unseen by the people of the planets they prowl, appearing only to their chosen prey and then only long enough to make their kill. Dispatched by an unseen power for a single purpose, they stalk, slay, and disappear without a trace.

Not even their quarry remains behind. Where these hunters pass, they leave only wreckage, signs of a struggle, and unanswered questions in their wake. For months they have been here, but only recently have they been given the command to proceed with their hunt. Their shadow master has spoken.

Kill the Jedi. Kill them all.

Only her Jedi training saved her from unconsciousness or worse when the back of her swoop burst into flames. She leaped clear of the hurtling vehicle just before it impacted a wall and exploded. Tumbling to escape the shockwave, she hit the ground hard and rolled into the nearest alley. Shaken but not badly injured, she stood up and looked around. The shadows of Hedrett at night were thick. She could see the lights of Cantina Row at one end of the alley, but that was the direction from which she had come; she did not dare head back that way.

She tried to get her comlink to work again, but the signal was still dead. Almas had to be warned. If she could not get a message off by herself, she would have to use civilian equipment. There had to be a comtower around here somewhere. Her datapad was still down, too, so she could not use a map. Without guidance, she was done for, so she took a chance and leaned into the shadows to use the Force.

In her mind's eye, the young Padawan saw a rolling tide of darkness closing in on her. Fighting back her mounting fear, she pushed past these shadow clouds and searched for her goal -- a communications array she could use to warn Almas of what her master had learned. Her master... She tried to suppress the terrible sadness and loss that suddenly flooded her mind at the thought of him. Her mind needed to be clear if her Farsight was to work. Any emotion would darken the Force and make it impossible to see.

Her meditation began to work. The images of her master's sudden death disappeared. There would be time to mourn his loss later. Right now, she needed what was becoming clear to her, a tall metal tower with a transmitter a few blocks away. That would suffice to send her warning. Now to get there and --

A clap of thunder and a shock of pain roused her from her vision. The alley wall a meter from her head was smoldering, and tiny pieces of shattered stone had sprayed her face and arm. They had found her! Before their next shots could land more accurately, she ignited her lightsaber and blocked the incoming fire. Too shaken to send the blaster shots back at her hunters, she opted instead for a Force-assisted jump to take her out of the alley and onto a nearby rooftop.

From there, it was only a dozen buildings or so to the transmitter. She could see it in the distance, lit up from below with the gaudy yellow and red lights of a vid-cast station. The station's listeners would have to tolerate a little down airtime; this was Jedi business. What she had to tell Almas might be the most important Jedi business in the history of Cularin. Two Padawans and her master had already lost their lives over it.

She jumped from rooftop to rooftop, the Force propelling her farther than muscle alone could. On the sixth building, she paused long enough to look back. The skyline of Hedrett was a row of shadows in the thin moonlight, uninterrupted save for the arcs of light from the industrial starport guiding transports in from orbit. She would need to make her way there and get off-planet as soon as she sent her message. Cularin was no longer safe for her. It was not safe for any Jedi now.

She turned around and started to run again. She had taken only a few steps when a burst of blaster fire lit up the rooftop ahead. A lone figure was briefly illuminated in the red glow of its weapon, and then the bolts of light tore through the air toward her. She barely had time to ignite her 'saber before they reached her. The first three were parried cleanly, but the surprise of the attack let the fourth get through and slam into her forearm.

Pain shot through her hand, and her lightsaber fell to the ground, sputtering and fading as it dropped. The figure flew into the air, a pair of rocket plumes trailing behind as it closed the distance in a heartbeat. She summoned the Force in desperation and slammed the flying shape as hard as she could, but it was not enough to keep her opponent away. Picking up her 'saber with her good hand as quickly as she could, the Padawan rose up just in time to block a powerful overhead strike from a dark metal blade.

The figure was right on her now, not that she could see it clearly. The bright light of the blaster bolts and the blue glow of her own lightsaber made it hard to make out her silhouetted attacker. She had not seen any of them clearly, nor had any of the others before they had been killed. Whoever -- or whatever -- these hunters were, they had been impossible to shake and seemingly immune to the Force. She tried to affect her foe's mind again, but there was nothing there. It was like reaching into a void.

Mindless or not, the armored hunter had great skill. It was everything she could do to block its masterful strokes. Strangely, the curved weapon in its gauntleted hands was not being cut apart by contact with her lightsaber.

Stranger still was the faint singing hum the blade made as it arced through the air with each swing. It was almost hypnotic...

With a frantic push of the Force, she managed to drive her foe back and clear an escape path. As her attacker smashed into the wall of a rooftop shed nearby, she ran as quickly as she could for the next building. There were only two more to go before she reached the transmitter. Even if it cost her life, Almas had to know about these Jedi hunters and, more importantly, where they came from.

At the height of her last jump, she felt something sinuous wrap around her just before a pulse of electricity shocked her into agonized near-unconsciousness. She plummeted forty feet to the hard street below, only meters away from the vid-cast station. She was only dimly aware of being dragged out of the street by a cable attached to her bindings. Then, in the darkness, there was the faint song of a humming blade as it descended, followed by a mercifully brief flash of pain.